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ABSTRACT

The writing program administrator (WPA) at a small, Catholic liberal arts college has many roles in fulfilling her job responsibilities and upholding institutional values, which include collaboration, dialogue, and application of knowledge to benefit others and the environment. Some of these roles include: teaching four courses, engaging in committee work, curriculum planning, participating in service learning and community outreach, developing a writing resources Web site, and advising students and student organizations. Even while on sabbatical, the WPA acts as a consultant for the college. The WPA participates collaboratively in designing various workshops for faculty development and exchange of ideas, and she also participates in the field. Finally, the WPA utilizes the institution's mission statement and policy in administering the writing program and in being part of a dialogue for change. (Contains 10 references. An annotated 10-item list of works cited in the paper and the presentation is attached.) (EF)

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Practices, Principles, and Essences: How a WPA at a Small Liberal Arts College Functions within Her Community and Its Values

Panel Theme: Reenvisioning the WPA: Why We (Can) Like Our Work
Chair: Rita Malenczyk of Eastern Connecticut SU
Co-presenters: Linda Bergmann of University of Missouri at Rolla, and
Carol Rutz of Carleton College

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Imagine this scenario:

You are a full-time Associate Professor of Communication Arts who has been teaching for almost a decade at a small, Catholic liberal arts college in the Philadelphia area. When you started there, the school was advertised as "the best kept secret" in the area, and it was. Students then were tapped from high schools in the surrounding area, and the enrollment then seemed around 1000 or so with the evening adult program and the daytime nursing program drawing most of its students. Each of your writing classes then ranged in size from seven to 23 students with most being female and Caucasian, and all of your students then commuted to school. The college emphasized then as well as now its programs with a strong professional focus, and its mission to support its Franciscan and Catholic identity. Today, the college is a member of an inter-college consortium, SEPCHE, the SouthEastern Pennsylvania of Colleges in Higher Education, so you are conscious of this collaborative identity, too, with seven other member institutions.

The mission of this small Franciscan college emphasizes what you perceive as three values: a collaborative spirit within and beyond the college that fosters positive relationships and understandings; dialogue; and knowledge that is applied to benefit the well being of others and the environment. These values, while highly idealistic, are evidenced in the culture of the college, as modeled by administrators and faculty, and in

some of the programs. As the WPA, you have tried to enact the values of the college by engaging in activities, several of which are detailed as follows:

- You realize that each year one common writing task across each section of first year composition can be designed to elicit an awareness of Franciscan values in relation to a local issue on campus. For next year, you and a colleague from the Environmental Education program plan to design the essay prompt, and select several readings that the students can discuss across each section. Student leaders in the Environmental Club will be prepared to enter each class to discuss what each student can do to make the campus aware of recycling efforts.
- You participated in the service-learning trip to New Mexico with several administrators, faculty members, and students two years ago to assist at a small Catholic school populated primarily by children from the Acoma and Laguna pueblos. For this project you decided to teach yourself how to write a webbed essay with hypertext links to capture the essence of the trip. You have presented this webbed essay to at least four public forums. While at the school, you also assisted the principal with completing several administrative projects. You see how your own writing models the types of communication you wish the students and other colleagues to engage in.

- You realize that teaching an upper-level writing course with a service-learning project for a program outside of Communication Arts is yet another way to explore dialogues about writing with faculty across disciplinary boundaries. You plan to act on this project next year after you figure out how to collaboratoe on the design of an inter-divisional course.
- You are excited about having been asked to be part of a team of faculty and administrators from your college that represent several disciplinary areas (political science, environmental education, pastoral counseling, and writing) who will be participating in an all-day workshop one Saturday in April at your college for senior citizens. You realize that you will cross yet another boundary about how your role is defined as a compositionist at your college.
- You have developed a basic Writing Resources website at Blackboard.com for the faculty to reference as they design their writing assignments in the various disciplines. You see this as a work in progress.

Your function as a full-time professor of Communication Arts and coordinator of writing, you understand includes teaching four courses a semester, engaging in committee work each year for faculty senate, intermittently participating in a variety of committees-- Middle States self

studies in English and Communication Arts, and Political Science, certification for secondary education, the CAPTE self study committee for the graduate program in Physical Therapy, writing task forces, core curriculum task forces, judicial review committee, and a variety of other responsibilities related to the curriculum and culture of the college. Of course, you don't participate in all of these projects and activities each year, but you recognize that you have collaborated with colleagues across disciplinary boundaries for years.

Your responsibilities at the college, too, include those of a WPA, but these other aforementioned relationships with faculty in other disciplinary backgrounds allow you to see beyond simply teaching and supervising instruction of writing. Often this is the case at a small college; professors assume numerous activities. To date, you have taught at least a dozen different types of courses for this college at the undergraduate level. In terms of curriculum design, you now are conducting a feasibility study for a master's program in English with one of three or four focuses to be for writing. You realize that curriculum development takes time and added communication processes, so you work on this project as time allows.

Like other full-time faculty at your college, you interact with the students by co-advising the online magazine, co-advising the Communication Arts club, advising about 20 students in the Communication Arts major, and supervising one or two coop experiences

each semester. Occasionally you design and deliver workshops in the Student Leadership Development program. You meet intermittently with the Chair of Arts and Sciences, the Director of Placement, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and faculty who teach core writing to discuss issues or curriculum. Occasionally, you meet with the college's management team; these meetings you perceive of critical importance in a culture of change for delivery of instruction.

These varied roles and responsiblities paint a portrait of a cooperative/collaborative leadership model for the WPA, and you recognize that while your college is small, during the past decade, highly significant transformations have been occurring there. You realize that you have been privileged to have been part of all of these changes that have worked toward shaping the current identity and culture of the school.

The enrollment now at the college is approximately 1600 students with many living in the recently constructed residential facilities or in neighboring apartments. You recognize how the student population in the past decade has become more diverse by race, class, and gender, and how the number of traditionally aged students has increased. The college's full-time faculty still has no tenure, just contracts that are renewable, and many more adjunct instructors teach at the school today than ten years ago.

You are on a sabbatical this semester in your third year of a five-year contract. You had proposed to your administrators in 1999 that you would like to accomplish two goals during this hiatus from teaching: to learn how to develop a database of results from proficiency essay exams at the college from 1989 to present, and to study multimedia, so as to identify for faculty how to apply these resources for instruction. You perceive this time as essential for preparing you to exercise principled leadership. To achieve this end, you are doing post-doctoral studies at the institution where you received your doctorate in English with a Rhetoric and Composition specialty ten years ago. You are writing and presenting in several forums, and you are taking time to think about the role of a compositionist in an environment of change.

While on this sabbatical though, you continue to collaborate with several faculty and administrators at your college because you perceive your role as having specialized knowledge that you have come to realize other faculty and perhaps even the administrators may not fully understand. Your role at this institution, you now understand, is one of a catalyst for change—not just any change, but those that the institution can handle. Through email, face-to-face meetings, and telephone conversations, you continue to advocate for resources related to what you think the students need to succeed in their academic writing and their learning.

You acknowledge that the college only three years ago very wisely installed communication tools-- telephones with voice mail on your desk, and a computer with a printer. You have access to your college's internal email messages from wherever you might have access to the Internet. With these communication tools, you can continue to consult with the team of decision makers at the college, yet still enjoy the relaxation of your sabbatical. While on sabbatical, you have been consulted with about a centralized learning/advising/tech facility that is almost complete, and you have met the new Director of Instructional Technology, who only a few months before, you, as part of a team, had interviewed. You feel that you are listened to even though your ideas are not always acted upon right away. In short, you believe that your college is doing all that it can with available resources to provide the best possible support for its students, and faculty, too.

You recognize one other highly significant arrangement for your school. This college, you see, while it has its own Franciscan identity, is one of eight small Catholic colleges in the Philadelphia area that belong to a consortium called SEPCHE, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Colleges in Higher Education, started in 1993. This collaborative arrangement makes possible the types of inter-college communication for sharing resources in terms of faculty workshops, linked courses, resources in libraries, programs, and perhaps, too, faculty. As stated in SEPCHE's website, the goal of this group is to effect "inter-institutional cooperation

and technological linkages" (April 2001). If you consider this arrangement, then the total possible student population across each of these colleges exceeds 15,000, and the faculty you may interact with at these SEPCHE-sponsored faculty and student workshops and exhibits over the course of several years may add up to several hundred. These occasions, when carefully orchestrated, you recognize, allow for a rich exchange of ideas for faculty, students, and administrators.

You are aware of collaborative processes as the means for sustaining faculty energy and interest at your college. You participated in one project along with seven other colleagues from Neumann in 1999 by piloting online courses through the E-college.com service (formerly Real Education.com). In a Faculty Forum at your college, you delivered a paper about your concerns related to student identity and ethical behavior in the delivery of your online writing course given the design of the shell for this course. Another colleague of yours conducted a case study analysis for her dissertation (2001) of how 21 faculty members across the varied institutions in the SEPCHE consortium used the Internet for instructional purposes. You know that the results of this study reveal much about the values and beliefs that the professors hold about teaching and learning, even more than all other factors that were analyzed. You function in a culture of reflective action.

In the past year and a half, the coordinator of SEPCHE workshops

has requested that you deliver two workshops for faculty from the different colleges: one two-day workshop co- facilitated with the chair of Arts and Sciences from your college about how to use the Internet for teaching and learning in the Humanities, and the other, on electronic communication across the curriculum. These two workshops were delivered in the computer facilities at two other colleges in the consortium. You recently participated in a third technology and professional writing workshop at yet another college in the SEPCHE group. These collaborative efforts across colleges move beyond the nuts and bolts issues related to teaching writing and coordinating the program, yet you find these interchanges fertile ground for fostering greater understanding and dialogue about teaching and learning. In May, the institutions plan two more faculty development days with ongoing workshops at most of the member colleges. Occasions to consider the ethics of writing program administration and time to engage in meaningful dialogue with others outside of your institution succeed at stimulating thought, for to administer a writing program "is an ethical enterprise" (Recchio 160). The structure that allows for these faculty development days succeeds at providing a forum for exchanging ideas because it "allow[s] for conversations across our different locations" (Gunner 51) and the opportunity for "significant enduring improvements" (Senge 114). Typically there is a follow up to these sessions in the form of shared resources and further dialogue. You realize that this

collaborative model that links eight institutions allows for possibilities to enhance teaching and learning processes.

You realize that your college is a dynamic environment where you, the WPA, need to consider significant changes or forces from within the college or the consortium, and also, those from without. This awareness sharpens your thinking about writing, and contributes to your advocacy for the best possible program with the best possible human and material resources.

Beyond these exciting resources within your college's institutional culture and the intra-college cultures, you continue to participate in the field. You have made the "Writing Outcomes Statement" available to those who teach core writing and those on the current core revision team. You have used "The Portland Resolution" and "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration" to design your administrative contract at the college for 1999-2000. To remain current in the field, too, you belong to the PWPA, the Philadelphia Writing Program Administrators group, and you are part of the WPA listserv. All kinds of resources, you know, are available, so there is no need for the WPA at a small institution to ever feel isolated or lacking in resources. There even is a small colleges listserv to which you belong, for you realize that what happens at your school sometimes is rather unique compared to other contexts.

You realize how important the mission of an organization is for creating and delivering a program. Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning* Organization emphasizes how "localness" is the cornerstone in designing learning organizations" (288). In order to discern what this means at your college, you frequently return to its mission statement and its values. You identify the reality of principles and practices in relation to the values and learning goals that are explicitly stated in all of the college's public relations material. While "sometimes the most effective changes take the most time to effect" (Maid 209), the reality at your college shows that major changes have occurred rather swiftly when the college management team agrees to a solution. Over time you begin to figure out "where actions and changes in structure can lead to significant, enduring improvements" (Senge 114), to use your "leverage" to enhance the values of the institution. You begin to consider kinds of holes in the organization by creating solutions to a "heretofore uncontrollable part of the organization" (Maid 210). It's important though for you to consider how you pace your projects and campaigns related to the program and its human resources, for you need to remind yourself that the collaborative model of decision making is valued at this college.

This is not a picture of a problem-free environment for you as the WPA. It's an environment that poses challenges, that offers a view "that sharing authority needn't mean reducing authority (Haviland and White

222). Your valuing collaboration and dialogue, you understand, are key determinants for enjoying your role as the WPA at this small college that in the past was "the best kept secret" among the 80 or so colleges in the Philadelphia area. You realize that your role as a WPA in mid career is an exciting challenge, and you enjoy being part of the dialogue for effecting and implementing change.

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Gunner, Jeanne. "Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas." *WPA* 22:3 (Spring 1999): 31-54.

Haviland, Carol Peterson, and Edward M. White. "How Can Physical Space and Administrative Structure Shape Writing programs, Writing Centers, and WAC Projects?" Ed. Linda Myers-Breslin 212-222.

Maid, Barry M. "How WPAs Can Learn to Use Power to Their Own Advantage." Ed. Linda Myers-Breslin 199-211.

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Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline:* The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization. NY: Doubleday, 1990.

Annotated Works Cited
for Paper and Presentation,

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Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers: Scenarios in Effective Program Management. Ed. Linda Myers-Breslin. Urbana, ILL: NCTE, 1999.

This text includes cases for analysis of situations, roles and responsibilities of WPAs in different contexts. The text is categorized into three sections: Selection and Training, Program Development, and Professional Issues of Departmental Authority and Professional Development. Institutional climates, cultures, philosophies, political realities, space and financial constraints all figure into the identity of a writing program, as described by WPAs in the 19 scenarios.

Gunner, Jeanne. "Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas. *WPA* 22:3 (Spring 1999): 31-54.

Gunner identifies a problem with the narrowness of the discipline that has professionalized many WPAs, how often "As WPAs in the WPA publishing in the WPA journal, we are frequently-sometimes, it seems, exclusively- left talking to ourselves" (50). Gunner suggests that WPAs as individuals and as an organization begin to explore "identity and location" beyond the specialized discourse community, and to be receptive to roles and responsibilities, or an identity that "allows for conversations across our different locations" in different types of colleges and universities, "and which might enable us to speak our WPA-knowledge to others in venues beyond the WPA, and to learn more about WPA-ness in contexts beyond the research university" (51). This "hybridization" of a WPA's "location" begins to portray other models of leadership that show collaborative models of decision making and roles beyond those described typically in the literature about a WPA.

Haviland, Carol Peterson, and Edward M. White. "How Can Physical Space and Administrative Structure Shape Writing Programs, Writing Centers, and WAC Projects?" Ed. Linda Myers-Breslin 212-222.

This case for the location (physical space and location in the administrative structure) of a writing center, writing courses, and writing across the curriculum program at California State University points to analyses of eight criteria to assist with a recommendation about its program. The eight criteria that led to a final decision of a collaborative model that positioned writing program coordinators in each major program and a close alliance with the English Dept. supported a philosophy "which recognizes multiple contributions and argues that sharing authority needn't mean reducing authority" (222). This model selects a discipline-specific coordinator each month who communicates to the administration as a representative of each discipline-specific coordinator across the curriculum, and by so doing, the administrators "settle for a more participative and complex structure" of leadership (222).

Maid, Barry M. "How WPAs Can Learn to Use Power to Their Own Advantage." Ed. Linda Myers-Breslin 199-211.

In this case study, the newly elected WPA at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock discovered that first finding out an organization's maze, its history, its members and their values and beliefs, the effects of change on members' personal lives, the boundaries of acceptance among members of the organization, and perceptions of choices is most important. Maid identifies two rules that govern his solution in this case: to somehow get outside of the organization to see it more clearly, and to exercise control over "chinks" in the organization by creating solutions to "a heretofore uncontrollable part of the organization" (210). Being conscious of the political repercussions of a WPA's acts are made evident in this analysis, so an emphasis on developing collegiality is made. He advises WPAs to remember the effects of instituting changes too quickly at an institution that might have a history of deeply-entrenched practices: "While so much of what we do takes place in an instantaneous environment, I think we need to remember to be patient when initiating institutional changes. Sometimes the most effective changes take the most time to effect" (209).

Malenczyk, Rita. "Productive Change in a Turbulent Atmosphere: Pipe Dream or Possibility." Ed. Myers-Breslin 146-164.

This case analysis of Northfield State University details the complicated role of a WPA positioned in a department with no release time to perform duties, and a struggle to maintain respect and trust of colleagues in that department. The new WPA is presented with a political dilemma—an administrator's request to replace a position once filled by a literature faculty who has retired by a professional prepared to teach developmental writing courses. To complicate the matter further, these developmental writing courses. This case describes politics and situations that place the WPA in a no-win situation. With a union to support her, and a department chair willing to engage in dialogue, she has managed to stave off the plan for developmental education, and to create a dialogue among members of the English department about how to recreate this curriculum. Because the faculty was empowered to make this decision after having been informed by Malenczyk of current theory in the field, the developmental writing program actually stands a good chance of succeeding if perhaps the right people will be employed to make that happen. The long standoff with one VP at the college who is interested in placement and outcomes testing has created doubts for the WPA though, for she admits at the end of the discussion of this scenario, "I still keep a letter of resignation in my back pocket in anticipation of either a negative tenure decision or my circumstances becoming more unbearable than they already are" (164). Interestingly, Malenczyk refers to the document, "Evaluating the The Intellectual Work of Writing Administration."

Mullin, Joan A. "Writing across the Curriculum." Ed. Myers-Breslin 97-111.

This case analysis details the Writing across the Curriculum program at the University of Toledo and the range of rhetorical knowledge the WPA might consider for presenting solid arguments to the faculty and administration. The WPA describes the challenges and identifies her strategies for effectively dealing with each. Mullin claims that the success of the WAC program's proposed requirements "is complicated by the fact that any program favored by administration is in danger of being voted down by a continually demoralized faculty" (97). The health of a writing across the curriculum program reflects the well-being of the faculty and their perceived ownership of the program. Mullin details activities over her ten years supervising the writing across the curriculum program at the University of Toledo, and she shows her insights about nurturing the success of a program: the need for publicity early on, recruitment of students for a course to prepare them to become tutors, the design for a protocol that writing tutors could use and forms for their communicating about sessions, and a design of a database to collect information about sessions in the writing center. Over the years, she engaged in ongoing dialogue with faculty across the disciplines, she

collaborated on research projects with faculty, she developed online resources for faculty, and finally, she details how she "ran the numbers" to see how WAC courses could be scheduled even in the face of institutional downsizing for courses and faculty. Her collaborative spirit to communicate results to the faculty, and her ongoing dialogue with administration contributed to the Arts and Science's Curriculum Committee's vote of approval to continue the WAC requirement as had been developed. This is a case study of continued leadership and ongoing dialogue across the curriculum to defend and sustain a sound curricular design even when it is working well.

Phelps, Louise Wetherbee. "Mobilizing Human Resources to (Re)Form a Writing Program." Ed. Myers-Breslin 73-96.

In this case study analysis of Cicero University, Phelps describes transitional strategies close to what she operationalized at Syracuse U in the mid 80s. She describes a tremendous shift from a traditional two semester comp program to one that mobilized people resources to move outside of traditional roles of instructor and tutor to writing coordinators, writing consultants, and instructors. These changes came in response to downsizing at the college, moving to a higher standard for admissions, a space crunch for a resource center, and difficulties about funding an evolving writing program separate from the English Department. Her solution to her top administrator's request for reform emerged through her framing the problem around four tasks to achieve the goals of program reformation: 1. Create intellectual capital and make it accessible 2. Create social capital 3. Reorganize work roles and work processes to align with a new instructional plan for writing across the curriculum 4. Determine how to fund solutions and reserve soft funds for pilot projects only. Phelps describes a process of professionalizing faculty members that teach writing in the program.

Recchio, Tom. "Writing Program Administration as Conversation." *WPA* 21:2/3 (Spring 1998): 150-161.

Recchio makes explicit the hidden curriculum of his WPA situation: practices that point to acts of surveillance in his program and many others that reveal disciplinary power rather than that which he wishes as his role as WPA to create—ethics and meaningful conversations. "If to teach writing is an ethical act (and I would agree all teaching implies an ethics), then to administer a writing program is an ethical enterprise. If one grants those two points, then the reasonable conclusion to draw is that ethical writing program administration depends on the quality of relationships not only between the WPA and other administrators or between other administrators and teachers but between the WPA and writing teachers and among the writing teachers

themselves. In addition, within institutions relationships develop through language; thus, the quality of relationships within a writing program depends in large part on the quality of conversation (in the philosophical sense of Gadamer, not the instrumental sense of Bruffee) that the writing program stimulates and sustains (or not) (160).

Schon, Donald A. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner; Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline:* The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization. NY: Doubleday, 1990.

Senge analyzes the "creative tension of personal mastery." Senge describes this quality as foundational to a learning organization: It is the "discipline of personal growth and learning [for p]eople with high levels of personal mastery are continually expanding their ability to create the results in life they truly seek. From their quest for continual learning comes the spirit of the learning organization" (141). He shows how holding one's personal and professional vision while communicating the "truth about current reality relative to that vision" dramatizes the issues and makes clear paths to resolution of conflicts or disparities between the vision and the reality. He emphasizes how "localness is the cornerstone in designing learning organizations" (288) which clearly connects to the role of any WPA. What is the institutional context? What is the mission of the institution? What is the reality of practices and principles in relation to the stated goals? Senge defines "leverage" as the ability to see "where actions and changes in structure can lead to significant, enduring improvements" (114). The learning organization, Senge claims, "will make key decisions based on shared understandings of interrelationships and patterns of change" (204).